

PLANNING, D&A AND HERITAGE STATEMENT

RUDYARD LAKE ACTIVITY CENTRE

MARCH 2026

Site Address:

Rudyard Lake Activity Centre, Lake Road, Rudyard, ST13 8XB

Applicant:

Rudyard Lake Trust

Proposal:

Formation of play area

Planning, D&A and Heritage Statement:

Date Issued: 12th March 2026

Job Reference: RDP/2026/008

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 Rob Duncan Planning Consultancy Ltd. has been instructed by Mr. R. Perry of the Rudyard Lake Trust to prepare a planning application for the formation of a play area on land adjacent to the existing visitors centre at Rudyard Lake, Lake Road, Rudyard.
- 1.2 The land upon which the play area is to be created comprises a slope that rises up from the existing car park to the east, towards the western site boundary. There is an existing footpath that rises up from the car park to the northeast of the proposed play area, and which traverses across towards the southern part of the site. The new play area is to be accessed via this pedestrian footpath via a short new footpath link.
- 1.3 The proposed play area will be broadly rectangular in shape and has been designed to offer minimal intrusion into the existing slope with a view to safeguarding surrounding trees. Retaining walls constructed from sleepers supported by steel posts will be provided to the eastern and western flanks of the play area, along with parts of the northern and southern boundaries.
- 1.4 Within the play area will be a variety of play equipment including a wildlife finger maze, an ocean finger maze, a wobble bridge, stepping logs, trapeze ropes, balance beam, swing steps, petal drum and rain wheel. The play area will be surfaced with a recycle rubber mulch system.
- 1.5 This document sets out the case for planning permission to be granted and should be read in conjunction with the following accompanying documents:
 - Arboricultural Impact Assessment (Hamps Valley)
 - Biodiversity Net Gain Plan (Hewitt & Carr Services)

2 Site Location

- 2.1 The application site lies to the southwest of the Rudyard Lake Visitors Centre which lies on the south-westernmost shore of Rudyard Lake. The site currently comprises a rising embankment upon which there are some informal sitting areas, as well as an underground crawling tunnel that was previously approved under application SMD/2010/0299.
- 2.2 Upon the land are a number of trees that are protected by a Tree Preservation Order (LR008A001). The landscape rises up in a westerly direction away from the existing car park area to the east, with the lake located beyond. The Rudyard Activity Centre lies to the northeast. Further to the west, beyond the western site boundary lie a number of residential properties located on the eastern side of Lake Road.
- 2.3 The site as a whole forms part of an area designated as an area of open space (Rudyard Lake) and is located within the Rudyard Conservation Area. The site as a whole is also located within the North Staffordshire Green Belt. No part of the site is located within the flood plain.

3 Planning Policy

3.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires proposals to be determined in accordance with the Development Plan taking into consideration any material considerations relevant to the determination of the application. The Development Plan for this area comprises the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan 2020 of which the following policies are of relevance to the determination of the application:

3.2 Policy SS1 of the Local Plan relates to 'Development Principles' and states that the Council will expect the development and use of land to contribute positively to the social, economic and environmental improvement of the Staffordshire Moorlands in terms of delivering, in partnership with other agencies and services:

- a mix of types and tenures of quality, affordable homes, to meet the needs and aspirations of the existing and future communities
- quality local services, including provision for education, healthcare, leisure, community, cultural and tourist facilities in response to anticipated population change and visitor numbers
- easy access to jobs, shops and transport services by all sections of the community
- increased economic prosperity and opportunities for employment and greater local capacity with an educated, skilled and flexible workforce

- a healthy, safe, attractive, active, well-designed and well-maintained environment
- development which maintains the locally distinctive character of the Staffordshire Moorlands, its individual towns and villages and their settings
- development that is undertaken in a way that protects and enhances the natural and historic environment of the District and its surrounding areas, including the Peak District National Park, both now and for future generations
- support development which secures high quality, sustainable environments, efficient and effective use of resources and contributes effectively to tackling climate change and reduced carbon emissions

3.3 Policy SS10 of the Local Plan relates to the 'Other Rural Areas Strategy' and states that the rural areas will provide only for development which has an essential need to be located in the countryside, supports the rural diversification and sustainability of the rural areas, promotes sustainable tourism or enhances the countryside. This will be achieved by a number of measures, including:

- Giving priority to the need to protect the quality and character of the area and requiring all development proposals to respect and respond sensitively to the distinctive qualities of the surrounding landscape
- Supporting sustainable tourism developments and measures in the Churnet Valley in accordance with Policy SS 11 and the Churnet Valley Masterplan SPD

- Maintain the Green Belt within Staffordshire Moorlands. Strict control will continue to be exercised over inappropriate development within the Green Belt allowing only for exceptions as defined by Government policy.

3.4 Policy SS11 of the Local Plan relates to the 'Churnet Valley Strategy' and states that the Churnet Valley is identified as an area for sustainable tourism and rural regeneration. The Churnet Valley Masterplan provides a comprehensive framework for development in the Churnet Valley and development should be in accordance with the Masterplan. Within this area particular support will be given to the following forms of development and measures:

- short stay and long stay visitor accommodation
- the expansion of existing tourist attractions and facilities and the provision of compatible new tourist attractions and facilities
- measures to enhance, protect and interpret the landscape character and heritage assets of the Churnet Valley
- measures to remediate and restore derelict land, buildings and features including the appropriate redevelopment of sites
- actions to protect and enhance the biodiversity of the valley, including the maintenance, buffering and connection of designated sites and actions to mitigate climate change.

3.5 Policy E4 of the Local Plan relates to 'Tourism' and states that new tourism and cultural development which complements the distinctive character and quality of the District will be supported having regard to the Area Strategies in Policies

SS5 to SS10 and Churnet Valley Strategy Policy SS11. New tourist, visitor and cultural accommodation, attractions and facilities should be developed in locations that offer, or are capable of offering either:

- A) good connectivity with other tourist destinations and amenities, particularly by public transport, walking and cycling; or
- B) in locations in or close to settlements where local services, facilities and public transport are available; or
- C) in areas specifically identified for tourism development in the Churnet Valley Masterplan or other relevant documents.

3.6 Policy DC1 of the Local Plan relates to 'Design Considerations' and states that all development shall be well designed and reinforce local distinctiveness by positively contributing to and complementing the special character and heritage of the area in line with the Council's Design Guide SPD. In particular, new development should:

- 1. be of a high quality and add value to the local area, incorporating creativity, detailing and materials appropriate to the character of the area
- 2. be designed to respect the site and its surroundings and promote a positive sense of place and identity through its scale, height, density, layout, siting, landscaping, character and appearance
- 3. create, where appropriate, attractive, active, functional, accessible and safe public and private environments which incorporate public spaces, green infrastructure including making provision for networks of multi-functional new and existing green space (both public and private),

landscaping, public art, 'designing out crime' initiatives and the principles of Active Design

4. incorporate sustainable construction techniques and design concepts for buildings and their layouts to reduce the impact of the development
5. protect the amenity of the area, including creation of healthy active environments and residential amenity, in terms of satisfactory daylight, visual impact, sunlight, outlook, privacy, soft landscaping as well as noise, odour and light pollution
6. promote the maintenance, enhancement, restoration and re-creation of biodiversity and geological heritage, where appropriate
7. provide for safe and satisfactory access and make a contribution to meeting the parking requirement arising from necessary car use
8. require new developments to be well integrated for car, pedestrian and cycle use as well as other sustainable transport links
9. ensure that existing drainage, waste water and sewerage infrastructure capacity is available, and where necessary enhanced, to enable the development to proceed
10. ensure, where appropriate, equality of access and use for all sections of the community
11. be served by high speed broadband (>30mbps) unless it can be demonstrated through consultation with Next Generation Access Network providers that this would not be possible, practical or economically viable.

In all circumstances during construction of the site sufficient and suitable ducting should be provided within the site and to the property to facilitate ease of installation at a future date.

3.7 Policy DC2 of the Local Plan relates to 'The Historic Environment' and states that:

- The Council will conserve and where possible enhance heritage assets, including their setting in a manner appropriate to their significance. This will take into account the desirability of maintaining and enhancing their significance and will ensure that development proposals contribute positively to the character of the built and historic environment.
- Protection will be given to designated heritage assets and their settings and non-designated heritage assets as set out in the NPPF.
- All applications likely to affect heritage assets will require the submission of a heritage statement, including a qualitative visual assessment where appropriate.
- Where development is likely to affect archaeology, both designated and undesignated, the Council requires the submission of a desk based assessment, and where appropriate, field surveys and trench evaluation by a qualified professional.
- Where the loss of significance is unavoidable, recording should take place and this should be added to the Historic Environment Record as a minimum, held by Staffordshire County Council.

- The Council will continue its proactive approach to heritage assets at risk and welcomes development proposals which would result in the sympathetic reuse of these assets in line with NPPF policy.
- The Council will promote development which sustains, respects or enhances buildings and features which contribute to the character or heritage of an area and those interests of acknowledged importance through the use of Conservation Area Appraisals, Design Guidance and Statements, Archaeological Assessments, Characterisation Studies and Masterplanning.

3.8 Policy DC3 of the Local Plan relates to 'Landscape and Settlement Setting' and states that the Council will protect and, where possible, enhance local landscape and the setting of settlements in the Staffordshire Moorlands by:

1. Resisting development which would lead to prominent intrusion into the countryside or have a significant adverse impact on the character or the setting of a settlement or important views into and out of the settlement as identified in the Landscape and Settlement Character evidence;
2. Supporting development which respects and enhances local landscape character and which reinforces and enhances the setting of the settlement as identified in the Landscape and Settlement Character evidence;
3. Supporting developments which conserve or enhance the biodiversity qualities of any natural or man-made features within the landscape, such as trees, woodlands, hedgerows, walls, watercourses or ponds;

4. Supporting opportunities to positively manage the landscape and use sustainable building techniques and materials which are sympathetic to the landscape;
5. Ensuring that development does not adversely affect the wider setting of the Peak District National Park.

3.9 Policy C2 of the Local Plan relates to 'Sport, Recreation and Open Space' and states that the Council will promote the provision of high quality recreational open space by implementing and supporting schemes that will protect, provide and improve the quantity, quality and accessibility of open space, indoor and outdoor sports and children's play facilities throughout the district, in accordance with the updated Open Space Study, Playing Pitch Strategy and Indoor Sports Facility Assessment (2017) and successor documents. Existing areas of open space, recreational land and buildings including school playing fields and amenity open space will be protected from development, unless:

- a) assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or
- b) the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; or
- c) the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the needs for which clearly outweigh the loss.

3.10 Policy C2 goes on to state that new sport, recreation and open space facilities should:

- a) be located in accessible locations and supported by the local transport infrastructure;
- b) protect the residential amenity of the area;
- c) be of an appropriate quality, scale and form compatible with the local area, especially if the site is located outside the settlement boundary in the open countryside;
- d) not harm interests of acknowledged importance; and
- e) be designed so that they are fit for purpose.

3.11 Policy NE1 of the Local Plan relates to 'Biodiversity and Geological Resources' and states that such resources shall be conserved and enhanced by positive management and strict control of development, by:

1. By ensuring all development schemes have regard to the surveys and actions recommended by the Council's Extended Phase 1 Habitat Surveys and Local Wildlife Assessment, and include measures for protection and enhancement of site biodiversity and protection of any geodiversity as appropriate.
2. Resisting any proposed development that could have an adverse effect on the integrity of an International site (or successor designation) alone or in combination with other plans or projects unless it can be demonstrated that the legislative provisions to protect such sites can be fully met. Any development with a potential to adversely affect a European site/s through construction activities should ensure that Ciria construction guidelines are

followed including environmental good practice on control of dust and water pollution.

3. The Council will not normally permit any development proposal which would directly or indirectly (either individually or in combination with other developments) have an adverse effect on a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Where an adverse effect on the site's notified special interest features is likely, an exception should only be made where the benefits of the development, at this site, clearly outweigh both the impacts that it is likely to have on the features of the site that make it of special scientific interest and any broader impacts on the national network of Sites of Special Scientific Interest.
4. Conserving, and enhancing regional and locally designated sites. The Council will not permit any development proposal which would directly or indirectly result in significant harm to geological and biodiversity conservation interests, unless it can be demonstrated that:
 - a) there is no appropriate alternative site available; and
 - b) all statutory and regulatory requirements relating to any such proposal have been satisfied; and
 - c) appropriate conservation and mitigation measures are provided; or if it is demonstrated that this is not possible
 - d) the need for, and benefit of, the development is demonstrated to clearly outweigh the need to safeguard the intrinsic nature conservation value of the site and compensatory measures are implemented.
5. Expecting all development where possible seeks to deliver a net gain in biodiversity proportionate to the size and scale of the development. In

circumstances where adverse impacts are demonstrated to be unavoidable, developers will be required to ensure that impacts are appropriately mitigated, with suitable compensation measures towards loss of habitat used only as a last resort where there is no alternative. Where any mitigation and compensation measures are required, they should be appropriately scheduled and managed according to the nature, size and scale of the development so as to minimise impacts that may disturb protected or important habitats and species.

6. Supporting opportunities to improve site management and increase public access to wildlife sites including supporting the objectives of the Staffordshire County Council Rights of Way Improvement Plan.
7. Ensuring development promotes the appropriate maintenance, enhancement, restoration and/or re-creation of biodiversity through its proposed nature, scale, location and design. The Staffordshire Moorlands Biodiversity Opportunity Map, in conjunction with the Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan, will be used to guide biodiversity enhancement measures to be included in development proposals as appropriate to the nature and scale of development proposed and other environmental interest, in particular supporting opportunities to increase grassland and heathland habitats including supporting targets in the UK and Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan.
8. Protecting and enhancing habitats and species of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity as identified in legislation, and recognising and implementing appropriate measures, including landscape-scale conservation management, to take account of the fact that the distribution of habitats and species will be affected by climate change.

9. Recognising the value of the natural environment for sport and leisure activities and the need to manage such activities to ensure there is no conflict.

10. Ensuring the provision and protection of green infrastructure networks in line with Policy C 3.

3.12 Policy NE2 of the Local Plan relates to 'Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows' and states that the Council will protect existing trees, woodlands and hedgerows, in particular, ancient woodland, veteran trees and ancient or species-rich hedgerows from loss or deterioration. This will be achieved by:

- Requiring that existing woodlands, healthy trees and hedgerows are retained and integrated within a proposed development unless the need for, and benefits of, the development clearly outweigh their loss;
- Requiring new developments to provide tree cover that secures a good level of sustainability through tree retention, planting and soft landscaping, including where possible the on site replacement of any trees that are removed with sufficient tree planting to replace or increase the canopy cover on-site as appropriate. Landscaping schemes will also be required to mitigate against negative landscape impact and complement the design of new development and make provision for future maintenance. Where it is not possible to secure this new or replacement tree planting within the site, the Council will work with applicants to ascertain if a suitable site(s) can be found off-site for replacement planting in the locality;
- Resisting development that would directly or indirectly damage existing ancient woodland, veteran trees and ancient or species-rich hedgerows.

4 Other Material Considerations

National Planning Policy Framework

- 4.1 The National Planning Policy Framework seeks to secure the delivery of sustainable development and sets out policies, *inter-alia*, in respect of controlling development in the Green Belt, securing high quality design, safeguarding heritage assets, protecting important trees, and achieving a net gain to biodiversity. The content of this document has been taken into consideration in the preparation of this application.

Rudyard Conservation Area Appraisal

- 4.2 This document assesses the characteristics and qualities of the Rudyard Conservation Area and identifies a series of problems and pressures in the area. The content of this document has been taken into consideration in the preparation of this application.

Churnet Valley Master Plan

- 4.3 The Master Plan provides guidance on new tourism development within the Churnet Valley, and identifies Rudyard Lake as a specific character area, and as an opportunity site. The content of this document has been taken into consideration in the preparation of this application.

5 Planning Assessment

Green Belt

5.1 The application site is located within the Green Belt. Policy SS10 of the Local Plan confirms that strict control will continue to be exercised over inappropriate development, allowing only for exceptions as set out in Government policy.

5.2 Paragraph 154 of the National Planning Policy Framework sets out those exceptions and makes provision for:

“the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use), including buildings, for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds and allotments; as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it”

5.3 The application proposes the formation of a new play area on the site, which amounts to an appropriate facility for outdoor recreation. It is furthermore submitted that the proposed development will preserve the openness of the Green Belt and not give rise to any conflict with the five purposes of including land within it.

5.4 The play area itself will be an open facility and whilst there will be play equipment located within it, that equipment will not adversely impact openness to any notable degree. The proposal entails the provision of retaining structures, but these will not be excessive in height and thus will preserve the openness of the Green Belt.

- 5.5 The proposed play area is consequently concluded to amount to an appropriate form of development within the Green Belt, in accordance with paragraphs 154 of the National Planning Policy Framework and policy SS10 of the Local Plan.

Without Prejudice – Very Special Circumstances

- 5.6 Notwithstanding the conclusions set out above, if the Local Authority were to conclude that the proposal amounts to an inappropriate form of development within the Green Belt it is submitted that a clear case of very special circumstances would exist to clearly outweigh the totality of harm arising.
- 5.7 The application site is located within the Churnet Valley wherein a strong focus is placed by policies SS11 and E4 of the Local Plan on expanding and providing tourist attractions and facilities where they have good connectivity to other tourist destinations and amenities.
- 5.8 Rudyard Lake is an important, well known and popular tourist destination within the Staffordshire Moorlands, drawing day visitors and staying tourists from a wide catchment. Its reputation strengthens the overall appeal of the Churnet Valley as a leisure and tourism destination, acting as a gateway location for visitors.
- 5.9 The lake supports a wide range of recreational activities, including walking, cycling, boating, angling, and informal family recreation. These activities appeal to diverse age groups and visitor types, helping to extend dwell time and repeat visits. Visitor activity at Rudyard Lake also helps to support local cafés, accommodation providers, shops, and visitor services in the surrounding area.
- 5.10 The Churnet Valley Master Plan recognises these factors, and highlights scope to enhance visitor facilities, interpretation and access in order to improve the

overall visitor experience. The proposed development is wholly consistent with these objections, and will serve to enhance the existing tourism offer at Rudyard Lake, helping to attract more and repeat visitors, including families. Such tourism benefits weigh heavily in favour of planning permission being granted.

5.11 In addition, policy C2 of the Local Plan places an emphasis on supporting schemes that will protect, provide and improve the quantity, quality and accessibility of open space, indoor and outdoor sports and children's play facilities throughout the district.

5.12 The proposal will see the existing play area significantly enhanced in terms of its quality and quantity and will not have an adverse impact on the amenity of the area. The proposal is therefore wholly consistent with the objectives of policy C2 of the Local Plan, and such considerations lend further weight in favour of planning permission being granted.

5.13 It is submitted that the aforementioned benefits would collectively serve to outweigh the limited harm that would arise as a consequence of the development. The proposal is consequently justified in Green Belt terms in accordance with paragraph 153 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Heritage Impact

5.14 The site is located within the Rudyard Conservation Area, and whilst there are no statutorily listed buildings in close proximity of the site, there are a number of non-designated heritage assets nearby, including:

- Rudyard Lake
- The outlet turrets on the Dam Head
- The former Earl of Macclesfield Boathouse (now used as an interpretation centre).

- 5.15 Rudyard Lake was constructed between 1797 to 1801 to act as a supply reservoir for the Caldon Canal, which is connected to the lake by a feeder channel that extends southward away from the Dam Head. The Lake is 3km long and has a long history as a tourist attraction, becoming increasingly popular after the North Staffordshire Railway was opened on the eastern shore of the lake in 1849. Tourism expanded in the early 20th Century with numerous boat houses becoming established.
- 5.16 From the 1950s onwards the attraction of the Lake started to dwindle due to the advent of motor vehicles and the closure of the railway in 1964. The establishment of the Rudyard Lake Trust in 1996 has nevertheless seen the popularity of the Lake increased, with new facilities provided, including the creation of a visitors centre and the establishment of the activity centre. The Lake remains an important tourist attraction within the Moorlands, and is recognised as such within the Churnet Valley Master Plan.
- 5.17 The outlet turrets on the Dam Head are located circa 65 metres to the east/southeast of the application site. There are visually impressive, situated on the Dam Head, and were designed by John Rennie (Renowned Civil Engineer).
- 5.18 The former Earl of Macclesfield Boathouse lies on the eastern shore of the Lake, some 200 metres to the northeast of the proposed play area. It is an attractive building that has been refurbished to provide a museum and public exhibition space (Application SMD/2007/0726 refers).
- 5.19 The proposed play area has been designed to minimise its visual intrusion, and will sit within the existing woodland to the west of the existing car park serving the Lake and northwest of the existing outlet turrets. The play area will not be notably visible from the Earl of Macclesfield Boathouse on the eastern shore, but will be visible from the Lake itself and from the dam head outlet turrets.

5.20 The setting of those heritage assets is already affected by the presence of the car park and the Rudyard Activity Centre / Café. The play area will be a complimentary addition to that area, constructed from a muted palette of materials that will assimilate positively with its woodland surroundings, such that no additional harm to the setting of these heritage assets or to the character and appearance of the area will arise.

5.21 The proposed development will therefore not give rise to any loss of significance to the Conservation Area or to the nearby non-designated heritage assets. As such the proposal is held to meet the requirements of policy DC2 of the Local Plan and guidance contained within the NPPF.

Design & Layout

5.22 The proposed play area has been designed to minimise its visual impact, with land level alterations kept to a minimum so as to avoid the need to tall retaining structures. The proposed play area will be neatly enclosed by timber sleepers and railings which will be seen against the backdrop of the steeply rising land, boundary wall, and nearby buildings beyond.

5.23 The proposed play equipment will furthermore be constructed from a muted palette of materials so as to further minimise the impact of the development on the character and appearance of the area. The proposed development is consequently held to meet the requirements of policies SS1, DC1 and DC3 of the Local Plan in this regard.

Impact on Trees

5.24 The application is accompanied by an Arboricultural Impact Assessment prepared by Hamps Valley which has appraised the quality of the existing trees within the woodland and assessed the impact of the proposed development upon them.

- 5.25 The Arboricultural Impact Assessment notes that the proposed play area is located where the existing play area is located and thus the land is already accustomed to some footfall compaction. It furthermore notes that all works will be carried out by hand as the land will not be accessible by machinery.
- 5.26 The formation of the upper retaining wall, utilising steel posts with timber sleepers in between will minimise the requirement for excavations to be undertaken within the root protection areas of surrounding trees. Some impact on the root protection areas (RPA) will nevertheless be necessary, but will only affect very small areas of the root protection areas. The lower retaining wall will not impact on existing trees.
- 5.27 The proposed removal of trees T3, T10 and T11 is not considered to be contentious and will allow more light into the play area and also reduce pressure for removal of other trees. The loss of those trees will be mitigated through biodiversity enhancements, as discussed within the accompanying Biodiversity Net Gain Plan documents to secure a 43.88% net gain to biodiversity. The proposed development is consequently concluded to meet the requirements of policies NE1 and NE2 of the Local Plan and guidance set out within the National Planning Policy Framework.

6 **Conclusion**

6.1 The submitted proposal constitutes a sustainable form of development having regard to the following conclusions:

- The proposed play area amounts to an appropriate form of development within the Green Belt.
- If the Local Authority were to conclude that the proposal amounts to inappropriate development in the Green Belt, the tourism benefits of the proposal, coupled with the enhancement benefits to the existing play area, amount to very special circumstances to warrant approval of the application.
- The proposed development will not give rise to any material harm to the character and appearance of the Rudyard Conservation Area or nearby non-designated heritage assets.
- The proposal will not have an adverse impact on protected trees, and will deliver a substantial net gain to biodiversity.

6.2 The proposed development consequently meets the requirements of policies SS1, SS10, SS10, E4, C2, DC1, DC2, DC3, NE1 and NE2 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan and guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework and the Churnet Valley Master Plan.